Theodor Herzl And Joe Chamberlain Meetings

October 22, 1902 – London, in the afternoon

Today I am to have the appointment with the great Joe.

October 23 , 1902 London

Talked yesterday with the famous master of England, Joe Chamberlain. One hour. I expounded everything I had intended to bring up, and he was a good listener. Unfortunately my voice trembled at first, which greatly annoyed me while I was speaking. After a few minutes, however, things improved and I talked calmly and incisively, to the extent that my rough-and-ready English permits it.

Addressing myself to Joe Chamberlain's motionless mask, I presented the whole Jewish question as I understand it and wish to solve it. My relations with Turkey, etc.

I am in negotiation with the Sultan," I said. ''But you know what Turkish negotiations are. If you want to buy a carpet, first you must drink half a dozen cups of coffee and smoke a hundred cigarettes ; then you discuss family stories, and from time to tint you speak again a few words about the carpet. Now I have time to negotiate, but my people has not. They are starving in the pale I must bring them an immediate help." Etc.

At the "carpet" story the mask laughed.

Then I came to speak about the territory which I wanted from England. Cyprus, El Arish, and the Sinai Peninsula.

He began by saying that he could speak only about Cyprus. The rest was not his concern but that of the Foreign Office. But as to Cyprus, this was how matters stood: Greeks and Moslems lived there, and he could not crowd them out for the sake of new immigrants. Rather, it was his duty to stand by them. Now if the Greeks – perhaps with the support of Greece and Russia – were to resist Jewish immigration, there would be real difficulties. Personally, he had nothing against the Jews; on the contrary. And if by chance he were to have a drop of Jewish blood in his veins, he would be proud of it. But voila, he didn't have a drop. However, he was prepared to help if he could; he liked the Zionist idea, etc.

In fact, if I could show him a spot in the English possessions where there were no white people as yet, we could talk about that.

In Cyprus there would be a trades-union problem, like the one here in the East End, which would arise from the influx of foreign workmen.

(I am reproducing his statements in somewhat disjointed form, the way they come back to me. He denied the existence of anti-Semitism in England. Perhaps there would be restrictive legislation if Jewish immigration were intensified — this evidently was a hint to me, the gypsy chieftain, to call off my hordes — but the race question did not enter into it; it was solely a trades-union question).

Just as the Greeks would resist the Jews in Cyprus, the Australians were now opposing Indian immigration. They are afraid of being swamped. And in his office he couldn't do anything against the will of the indigenous population.

"In our country everything is out in the open, and if Cyprus were discussed in this way, a storm would break loose immediately."

To which I replied that not everything in politics is really disclosed to the public— only results, or whatever may happen to be needed in a discussion. I then unfolded my plan of first of all having a current created in our favor in Cyprus. We ought to be invited to come there. I would have this prepared for by half a dozen emissaries. Once we establish the Jewish Eastern Compaq with 5 million pounds capital, for settling Sinai and El Arish, the Cypriots will begin to want that golden rain on their island, too. The Moslems will move away, the Greeks will gladly sell their lands at a good price and migrate to Athens or Crete.

He seemed to take to the idea. But he said he could make no statement on El Arish and Sinai. The government would want to hear the views of Lord Cromer, of whom they thought very highly.

Too bad that Lord Cromer was no longer here. He had already returned to Egypt.

"I can send somebody there," I said.

''But you will have to speak to the Foreign Office."

"Help me to do so, Mr. Chamberlain! I am leaving the day after tomorrow."

He thought it over and gave me an appointment for today 12:15, when I would be able to see Lord Lansdowne.

Was it before or after this that I drew a map of El Arish for him on a piece of paper that lay on his desk? Along with this, my Haifa hinterland idea: I hoped to induce the Turks to come to term: with me sooner if I also turned up at the Brook of Egypt. Then I might get the Haifa area cheaper.

At this the smooth-shaven mask laughed once more and dropped his monocle.

But he had no idea where El Arish was, and so we went to a big table where he pulled out an atlas from among other books, and in the atlas located Egypt. While he did so he said: "But in Egypt we would have the same difficulty with the present inhabitants, "No", I said, we will not go to Egypt. We have been there.

He laughed again, this time bent deep over the book. Only

now did he understand me completely, my desire to obtain

a rallying point for the Jewish people in the vicinity of Palestine.

In El Arish and Sinai there is vacant land. England can i give us that in return she would reap an increase in power and the gratitude of ten million Jews. All this I told him, and it made an impression on him. And I came right out with it:

"Would you agree to our founding a Jewish colony on the Sinai Peninsula?"

"Yes!" he said, "if Lord Cromer recommends it".

So that is the next thing I must attend to.

He dismissed me, and we arranged to meet again today.

Chamberlain does not give the impression of being brilliant. Not a man of imagination, a sober screw manufacturer who wants to expand the business. A mind without literary or artistic resources, a businessman, but an absolutely clear, unclouded head.

The most striking thing about the interview was that he didn't have a very detailed knowledge of the British possessions which undoubtedly are at his command now. It was like a big junk shop whose manager isn't quite sure whether some unusual article is in the stock-room.

I need a place for the Jewish people to assemble. He's going to take a look and see if England happens to have something like that in stock.

The main result, a tremendous one, which I achieved yesterday is that Joe Chamberlain does not reject outright the idea of founding a self-governing Jewish colony in the southeastern comer of the Mediterranean. Today I am taking this to Rothschild, with whom I have a midday appointment.

This, then, was yesterday.

At 12:15 I entered Chamberlain's business salon. For that is what the Colonial Office reminds one of. The drawing room of a shipping magnate.

Chamberlain rose, very busy He could spare me only a few minutes. But he said so in a most friendly manner. I believe the tip which I gave on my way out yesterday to the South African who also happened to have an appointment contributed to his friendliness. He was impressed by my far-reaching influence.

I remained standing in order not to take his time. So, naturally, did he.

He said to me:

"I have arranged a meeting between you and Lord Lansdowne. He expects you at 4:30 in the afternoon. I have already smoothed the way for you. Present the whole matter to him, but do not mention Cyprus. The Cyprus part of it is my affair. Tell him in particular that your proposed colony is not a jumping-off place aimed at the Sultan's possessions."

As he said this, his face was all smiles. In fact, the mask was amazingly alive today and merry all the time.

I said: "Of course there can be no question of that, for I intend to go to Palestine only with the Sultan's consent."

He gave me an amused look, as if to say:

"Go tell that to the Sultan."

But aloud he said to me:

"Reassure Lord Lansdowne that you are not planning a Jameson raid from El Arish into Palestine."

"I shall set his mind at rest, Mr. Chamberlain!" I said, also smiling.

We shook hands, and on parting I told him that I was happy to have made his acquaintance.

April 24, 1903 London (6 months later)

With Chamberlain yesterday noon.

He received me amiably, like an old acquaintance. He struck me as having grown a great deal older and more care-worn, though still mentally alert.

"Since we last met, I have seen quite a bit of the world," he began. And in a moment we had got down to cases.

"I spoke with Lord Cromer about your project when I was in Egypt. What have you done?"

I told him, and referred to the Commission's report which I had sent him the day before and which was in front of him.

"That is not a favorable report," he said.

"Well," I said, "it is a very poor country; but we will make something out of it."

"I have seen a land for you on my travels," said the great Chamberlain, "and that's Uganda. It's hot on the coast, but farther inland the climate becomes excellent, even for Europeans. You can raise sugar and cotton there. And I thought to myself, that would be a land for Dr. Herzl. But of course he wants to go only to Palestine or its vicinity."

"Yes, I have to," I replied. "Our base must be in or near Palestine. Later on we could also settle in Uganda, for we have masses of people ready to emigrate. But we have to build on a national foundation, and this is why we must have the political attraction offered by El-Arish. But they don't understand that in Egypt. It is true that I wasn't able to make myself as plain there as I was here.

"There I was obliged to ask for a totally inadequate concession — in view of the political situation — and it only looks like a financial concession. As a land speculation it would be a bad deal. No one would give money for such a country. No one but ourselves — because we have underlying political motives. It should be clearly understood that we shall not place ourselves under Egyptian rule, but under British rule."

He: "I feel that things are likely to remain as they are. We shall not leave Egypt. Originally that was our intention. I am able to tell you this, for I was in the government. We planned to pull out of Egypt again in the eighties. But we have had to invest so much money and now have so many interests there that we can no longer get out. Thus you and your settlement will share the fortunes of that British possession. Should a different solution ever turn up, and if your colony is strong enough, I am sure you will assert yourself appropriately."

We spoke about this and that.

' In Asia Minor," Chamberlain said, "we have fewer and fewer interests. Some day there will be a showdown over that region between France, Germany, and Russia — whereas we are increasingly drawn to more distant points. I am wondering, in such a case, what would be the fate of your Jewish colony in Palestine, supposing you have succeeded in establishing it in the meantime?"

I said: "I believe that then our chances would be even better. For we shall be used as a small buffer-state. We shall get it not from the goodwill , but from the jealousy of the powers! And once we are at El-Arish under the Union Jack then Palestine too will fall into the British sphere of influence."

That seemed to make quite a bit of sense to him.

I spoke next about raising the money (through the I.C.A. and Rothschild). True, with 5 million pounds we couldn't go very far in that desert. The country would have to be made attractive, and then he, Joe Chamberlain, would get credit for providing England with another colony.

His reaction to this, too, was not unfriendly. He said we would have to have Rothschild with us in any event, for the English government counted on him.

We have him," I said. "Of course, I could also do it without him. The main thing is that I finally get the concession, otherwise I cannot go ahead. Man's life is short.

We also discussed the Jewish immigration. He said that the opposition to aliens was merely the effect of competition. The same thing could be observed in other parts of the Empire against other ethnic groups subject to England, e.g. in South Africa. I think he mentioned Indians who were being resisted in South Africa. Similarly, the government in England might suddenly be faced with the necessity of passing an Alien Bill against the Jews, because popular pressure might be brought to bear on the government.

"If you allow me to say so, Mr. Chamberlain, I should prefer for England's glory that you do not make such a Bill. Drain them elsewhere, but don't make an Alien Bill."

In conclusion he promised me that he would speak with Lansdowne, so that pressure might be brought to bear on Cromer to expedite matters.

He accompanied me as far as the door, and helped me into my overcoat.